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FOURTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MANAGERS
AND OFFICERS OF THE STATE ASYLUM FOR
THE INSANE AT MORRISTOWN, N. J.

OCTOBER 31, 1879.

THE New Jersey State Asylum at Morristown is one of the largest and most expensively built of the institutions for the insane in this country. It has accommodations for eight hundred patients, and two million four hundred and fifty thousand dollars have been expended in the purchase of the site and the construction of the buildings. It is four, and in some parts more than four, stories in height, and is practically fire-proof, all the interior walls being of brick, and the floors laid upon girders of iron, connected throughout by arches of brick and cement. The wood-work has been reduced to a minimum in the construction of the building, and a fire in one room could hardly communicate to another. The building is heated with steam by indirect radiation, and the gas jets are or could be placed out of reach of interference by the patients, so that the risks of fire are not great. The necessity for the greatly increased expense of absolutely fire-proof construction of the building is not apparent. If the portions of the building between the separate halls or wings had been made fire-proof, and to contain the stairways from the basement to the mansard roof story, a fire could at most destroy only one wing or section of the building. Why, located as it is upon a farm of more than three hundred acres, the institution should have been so piled up toward the sky, is only explicable by the knowledge that the Association of Superintendents of American Institutions for the Insane approves of this plan of building, and that the Commissioners for the construction of the asylum, in the beginning of their work, secured the advice and ap-

proval of the leading members of the Association of Superintendents.

The report of the Superintendent of the Morristown Asylum for the year 1879 is, in many ways, a curious document. The statistics are meagre, but from them it appears that during the year more patients have been discharged by death than by cure, and the same thing is true of the whole period since the opening of the asylum. The report does not indicate how large a proportion of the patients are considered curable, but the percentage of recoveries upon those admitted during the year, and those under treatment during the same period, indicates that not more than ten per cent. of the patients in the asylum can be fairly considered as curable; so that the institution must be regarded as merely a home for ninety per cent. of its inmates. It appears that seventy-four of the whole number of private patients, who have been in the asylum since its opening, have been sent from New York, but that the physicians of this State, who have committed their patients to the care of the Superintendent of the asylum at Morristown, have known very little about his professional acquirements will, we think, appear from further consideration of the report. It may, however, be that the medical chief of the Morristown Asylum represents the best type of what, we fear, is a retrogressive and lifeless specialty, and that other asylums are either no better or much worse in their care and treatment of cases of insanity.

Upon the question of employment for the insane the report, while admitting its curative value in many cases, says it is by no means profitable, because of the short time made and the necessity of having overseers to supervise the work. The report claims that female are more industrious than male patients, and that the inmates of American asylums, unlike those in foreign institutions, will not work unless payment of wages is made or promised. The whole spirit of the paragraph indicates that the Superintendent does not believe in the practicability of systematic employment of the insane as a means of diminishing excitement and lessening the demand for mechanical and medicinal restraints. The assumption that the patients in American asylums cannot be employed and are less obedient to reason and moral influences than those in asylums abroad, is advanced as well in discussions in this country of the non-restraint system of management of the insane, and in this connection the testimony of Dr. Bucknill in his "Notes on Asylums for the Insane in Amer-

ica," may be given. "The essence of the non-restraint system is to lead the lunatic by such remains of mental power and coherence as the physician can lay hold upon, and where there has been least mind there will be the slightest means of moral guidance, but to make the men of the United States an exception because they, more than others, have learned how to rule themselves, is a blundering censure upon their culture and their virtues. The fact is that the hopeless, cheerless and unemployed life in the halls of our asylums results from a conviction that it is the safest and least troublesome mode of dealing with the insane and because of the tendency of institution life to degenerate into routine, and to use the expression of Pinel, 'unfortunate is the fate of those maniacs who are placed in hospitals for the insane, where the basis of practice is routine, and where, perhaps, the patients are abandoned to the savage cruelty of underlings.' Individualized treatment of patients or efficient supervision of attendants becomes impossible in an asylum which is intended for eight hundred patients, and which is officered by not more than three physicians."

We cannot refrain from giving a quotation from the report on the subject of amusements as an illustration of the owl-like gravity with which the venerable Superintendent utters the merest platitudes and the very pellucid style of English composition which characterizes his report.

"Among the selections for the stage exercise, in the amusement room, no performance gives greater or even so much pleasure to a large majority of the audiences, as plays and music by negro minstrels. This kind of performance is an appeal to the sense of the mirthful or ludicrous, a primitive tendency, or more properly a faculty of the human mind, the activity of which does as much to secure the natural resiliency or elasticity of the feelings and thus protect them against dullness and decline, as any other feeling or sentiment of the mental group. I regard the statement of this fact, so constantly verified by observation and even by personal experience, as one of great practical value to all who desire to become permanently connected with the care of disordered minds. By this I do not, of course, mean that persons thus engaged may, in any circumstances, wantonly amuse themselves by the eccentricities of the people under their charge, but that a more elastic and tranquil state of feeling, on their part, as well as better health, will be maintained by them, if they are so mentally constituted as to be able to see and appreciate the humorous side of the

little as well as the large occurrences observed in their daily and hourly duties. I may add, further, that persons of this mental balance or tendency are, even in life inside of asylum walls, more hopeful, cheerful and successful than those of an opposite character."

But the most noteworthy chapter of the report contains the views of the Superintendent on the physiology of the brain. He says : " Strange as it may seem, yet it is no more strange than true, that correct knowledge of the physiology of the brain or knowledge derived from systematic observation of its healthy functional action is, at best, and in the minds of a few persons only, in its infancy." We have been puzzled to find out what is intended by the modifying sentence, "in the minds of a few persons only." Does it mean that correct knowledge is in its infancy in the minds of a few persons only, or that only a few persons share the infantile knowledge of the Superintendent ? We understand the latter to be the true solution of the problem and we then learn that this defect in knowledge is caused by the worthlessness of the results of scientific study of the anatomy, physiology and pathology of the brain and because the physiologists and psychologists, " who have influenced the belief and modes of thinking of the past and present generations, have through the influence of prejudice against the only correct method of obtaining information of its functions during life, denied or ignored the results, which comparatively few others, but equally eminent observers have reached." The style of composition of the report is in parts so incoherent as to be almost unintelligible, but the Superintendent at any rate makes it clear that he accepts the dogmas of phrenology as " a rational and practical basis for the medical, mental and moral treatment of each and every case of insanity that may occur." He goes further and after quoting an extended statement of the doctrines of phrenology, says : " The facts and influences of this system, as stated, being true in regard to the physiology of the brain, the great importance of the discovery will be appreciated, as it furnishes the basis of a clear, full and intelligible system of mental science or philosophy." This conclusive statement of the claims of phrenology as the basis of a system of psychology is possibly intended for the benefit of the Professor of Mental Science in the College of New Jersey, at Princeton, for we learn that the Trustees of that Institution of learning some years ago conferred upon the Superintendent, who then had charge of the asylum at Trenton, the degree of LL.D. in recognition of his

eminence in the insane specialty, and gratitude for an honor, attempted to be conferred, may not be an unknown element in the mental experience of a follower of Gall.

It is curious to note that the Superintendent, in his report, does not give any reason for his faith in phrenological doctrine. He merely says the views of phrenology are his views, and therefore to be received. He quotes in support of the truth of phrenology from Gall and Spurzheim, whose work belongs to the last and the early part of the present century; from George and Andrew Combe, whose works were published nearly fifty years ago; from Sir William Ellis, who was superintendent at Hanwell before the days of Conolly and from others, all of whom belong to past generations, and none of whom have any weight of authority among living physiologists and psychologists. While it is true that some physicians in this country who are connected with asylums for the insane accept the teachings and unproven dogmas of phrenology, we have yet to learn of their acceptance by any educated physician outside of an insane asylum, and we do not know of any college or any reputable educational institution in the United States in which the students are taught phrenological doctrine as the basis of mental and moral science, or in which the terminology of phrenology is used in the classification of the faculties of the mind. The work of Gall, Spurzheim, George and Andrew Combe, and the earlier phrenologists, may have had its value in spite of the baseless theories which they advocated, but phrenology has long passed into the catalogue of false doctrines, which have for a time influenced the thoughts of men, and it may be considered as a discarded and extinct belief.

The report throughout is a most remarkable exhibition of defective knowledge and long-continued arrest of mental development. The Superintendent has evidently read nothing that has been published, even in his specialty, within the last thirty years, except, perhaps, the *Phrenological Journal*, and he is clearly ignorant of all modern contributions to the physiology and pathology of the nervous system, and of modern modes of diagnosis of nervous diseases by physical means and by the aid of instruments of precision. The report might have been written thirty or forty years ago, and in fact the Superintendent, when he was in charge of the asylum at Trenton, in the year 1852, in his report for that year, promulgated the doctrines of phrenology as the basis of classification of mental disease, and that report for the most part was an exposition of the teachings of phrenology in their relation to mental disorder.

That our hopes for asylum reform are not likely to meet speedy fulfillment is, we think, a fair inference from reading the report of the managers of the asylum at Morristown. The managers of the institution are among the most prominent and influential men in New Jersey, and yet they declare that "The remarks of the Superintendent on the 'Physiology of the Brain,' and the practical lessons therefrom, drawn as they are by Dr. Buttolph, who has made the study and treatment of insanity the work of his life, deserve the most careful consideration of all who are interested in the care and cure of the insane."

That a State, situated as New Jersey is, with a wealthy, intelligent and progressive population, should expend nearly two and a half million of dollars in the construction of a building for its helpless insane, and should then place in charge of it as chief executive officer a man who, in his training, his beliefs, and therefore in his modes of treatment, belongs to a past age, is an unaccountable exhibition of unwisdom.

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